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ABSTRACT

A course in personal social dynamics in education was experimentally organized to concentrate on the process of classroom interaction, integrating the affective with the cognitive components of learning. As a senior level course for teachers-in-training it has been offered three times with encouraging results. Goals are to help the student become a more acute observer, to assist him become more skilled in handling interpersonal problems, and to provide him with information and experience relevant to interpersonal relationships within schools. Upon entering the course each student is asked to prepare an outline of topics and individual goals for the course; the papers are analyzed to provide a more specific course outline. Formal lectures are minimized. The generalized class structure includes selective readings assigned by the instructor, six to seven short class assignments, term papers if desired, group presentations, exams, and a major term project which takes the student into actual school settings over a period of time to observe and report on a dyadic or small group interaction. Small student groups elect one of their number to a steering committee and prepare a group project for presentation to the whole class. The steering committee provides feedback for the instructor and a chance for students to modify the course. Examinations are of the open-book, take-home type. Each student chooses percentage weights for his final course grade. (Reading list and other materials given to students on the first day are included.) (JS)

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A PROCESS APPROACH TO TEACHING TEACHERS

by

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"This is the only course I have enjoyed this year, and the best course I have ever taken in all my years on campus. It is the first Educational Psychology course (of five) that I have taken which has contained anything that I have been able to perceive as specifically relevant to teaching. I feel I am taking away an attitude rather than isolated facts, and have really learned some new ways to get involved and to get others involved."

Thus, five student comments are combined to reflect what seems to be the majority view of more than 250 students taking a 1968-69 course in personal social dynamics in education. This class, formerly taught as a mental hygiene course, was experimentally organized to concentrate on the process of classroom interactions, integrating the affective with the cognitive components of learning. Formal lectures were minimized in an effort to try out ideas about teaching suggested by educational psychologists. While this course is ideally suited for such study, student reactions suggest application might be made to other university-level courses in education and elsewhere.

Student Concern and Motivation

A common concern of students taking courses in Education relates to their perception of the limited usefulness of much material covered. Comments are frequently heard which are quite derogatory to many of the required courses, particularly in the area of teaching methods and educational psychology. Clear reference or application to classroom situations seems lacking as professors lecture about group methods, learning theory, motivation, etc. while not demonstrating the theory in their own class. Recent articles by Guggenheim (1968) and Morris, et. al. (1969) suggest more effective ways of relating academic content to the reality of the university teaching situation.

Guggenheim asserts lack of relevance for educational psychology because it is taught as a cognitive, substantive course. "Children and teachers are

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uniquely human and must be reached through human relationships." He suggested that the content for educational psychology should be found in the interrelationships and the experiences within the class itself. Guggenheim talks about direct confrontation with the psycho-social development of the teacher trainee as a person and the class as a group. He found great success using a graduate class to focus on interaction between professor and students, and among students themselves.

Morris et. al. used an undergraduate course in the psychology of personal and social development at the University of California to look at the effect of substituting encounter groups for lectures. Half of the forty hours of class time were devoted to encounter or sensitivity training types of experiences, utilizing staff members of the counselling centre as group leaders. Course evaluation by the students indicated that they felt much more involved in the course and that the course was more relevant both to their present life and to their anticipated experiences. Three out of every four students indicated that they were more satisfied with this course than any other college course they had already taken.

The present course, developed prior to the publication of these articles, was a senior-level course designed both for teachers-in-training and experienced teachers returning to complete their degree. The goals of the course during 1968-69 were (1) to help the student become a more acute observer; (2) to assist him become more skilled in handling interpersonal problems; and (3) to provide him with information and experience relevant to interpersonal relationships within schools. Emphasis was placed upon the dynamics of teacher-student, student-student, teacher-administrator, and teacher-parent relationships. In September, 1968, each student first taking the course was asked to prepare an outline of topics and individual goals for the course. These 85 papers were analyzed to provide a more specific course outline. Every time the course was subsequently offered, changes were made reflecting suggestions by the previous group of students and reactions of the new students. During the summer of 1969, the course was presented to sixty students in a three-week concentrated format and at the conclusion over 95% of the students responded positively to the experience.

General Course Structure and Feedback

The class as a whole had a generalized structure which included selective readings assigned by the instructor, six or seven short class

assignments, term papers if desired, group presentations, exams, and a major term project. The latter was actually a major portion of a student's effort outside regular class time, and took him into actual school settings over a period of time to observe and report on a dyadic or small group interaction.

The importance of utilizing the case-method approach is emphasized by Andrews (1963), and was adopted in this course. All class members had been students in elementary and secondary schools at some point in their lives. Each of them has had both positive and negative experiences in his own life with regard to classroom interaction, deviant behaviour, and learning situations. A large portion of the class time was devoted to these experiences which provided the raw data for case study. Case discussion is crucial since the area of personal-social relationships provides no single right answer to a problem situation.

From the first day, emphasis during classtime was placed upon the dynamics of what was happening to the class members, both individually and as groups within the class. To this end, groups of nine or ten students were randomly formed and presented with a two-fold task: (1) the election of one of their number to a course feedback steering committee, and (2) the preparation by the group of a project or presentation to the whole class. Groups were later presented some class time for meetings and further organization. The three group concentric circle fishbowl technique (Gorman, 1968) was utilized. Three groups were formed:

Group A - Interacting (chairs in circles)
Group B - Observer-Coach (chairs behind circle)
Group C - General Observers (standing).

Group B observed individual members of Group A while Group C was concerned primarily with the overall dynamics of what was happening in Group A. Roles were reversed on subsequent days until all three groups had been in each of the circles.

The content emphasized in class was not always similar to that available in assigned readings. A conscious effort, however, was made to relate what was actually happening in the class in terms of social and personal dynamics to the pertinent literature. A good example of this was the group development, and movement over the term from a persuasive to a participative technology (Bradford et. al., 1964). Other materials were similarly analysed in terms of social psycho-

logical principles and related to a text such as Watson (1966).

The nature of this course and the freedom provided has tended early in the term to have a very unsettling effect on a number of students. Many students used to the university lecture method have felt very uncomfortable with the necessity of making choices about course participation and course content and the ensuing freedom of such choices. Typical first-day reactions took one of two forms.

I. Fear and High Anxiety Levels.

"Highly unstructured--this is good in some respects, however, I feel more of a frame of reference would be helpful."

"Frustrating, am not sure what's going on."

"Slightly confusing at first, atmosphere tense."

II. Excitement and Anticipation.

"Tantalizing, I am excited, expectant, and maybe even willing to work a little."

"The course seems to be forecasting a practical three weeks with plenty of self-involvement and activity. This is good."

"Just giving us the option to value our own work makes me feel as part of a class moving toward a common goal rather than passively attaining information."

As the course progressed, the first attitudes were usually modified.

Specific Format and Potential Pitfalls

I. Freedom. One of the key factors in establishing a democratic classroom climate is providing real freedom rather than surface or pseudo freedom. Through a somewhat ambiguous outline students in this class were provided general goals and wide limits and then given real freedom within these limits. This produced a certain ambiguity and seeming lack of structure often resulting in student anxiety. After the initial shock wore off, experience indicated that most students could indeed handle and utilize this freedom to learn and move ahead on their own and in small groups. As a result, they achieved more satisfying learning experiences than in most classes. There were always a few, however, who felt so lost that they sought constant direction to allay their own uncertainties, fears, and anxieties. These were usually people who were insecure, unsure of themselves, and not self-starters.

For example such a person was often a "bright student" but asked that the content of a term project be laid out point by point before he was able to proceed. By persisting, these people usually found sufficient structure to produce the minimun required and passed the course on an academic basis.

II. Steering Committee. Freedom was also given students to act alone or through a steering committee composed of democratically-elected group representatives. This group met six to ten times during the term providing both feedback for the instructor and a real chance for students to modify the course to meet as many individual needs as possible. Suggestions have enabled the professor to make many student-advocated course alterations. Most of the procedures outlined in this section have been either suggested or evaluated by students. In addition, deviations from planned course content have been made, scheduling deviations have been made, and assignments and readings have been modified or eliminated. Experience has suggested that the steering committee can be a useful feedback mechanism, but only when given a real function to perform besides expediting communication. If the committee is given decision-making power about matters which affect the life of the class as a whole, members tend to become much more involved and active as a part of an on-going group in its own right.

III. Group Projects. The task of a group extended throughout the term as they jointly prepared a group project. Anything related to the course was acceptable since the principal purpose was to provide a task through which groups can develop, provide meaningful content for other class members and show that learning can be fun. Presentations ranged from experiments to pure entertainment. The keynote has been the novelty, imagination, and creativity observed in the presentations. Some specific topics have been: Use of Groups in High Schools, Accuracy of Individual Perception, Problem of Students Dropping out of School, Teacher Dropouts, Effect of School Climate upon Teaching, How You Hold a Parent-Teacher Conference, How to Resolve an Educational Discipline Problem, Non-verbal Communication, Fulfilment of Prophesies about Students, and Communication Problem between Home and School.

IV. Class Assignments. It has been found that utilization of periodic brief classroom assignments related to the on-going process of what is happening in the class did help maintain motivation, and tied together some of the divergent elements that occured within the class. The assignments have forced students to briefly focus their attention on what the instructor feels are critical areas in the course. This also helped balance the widely divergent activities developed and encouraged within the groups themselves.

V. Term Projects. Since the purpose of the course was to learn about human interaction in the school setting and ways in which behaviour can be and is changed, the term project took place in a school setting if at all possible. The instructor's major goal was that the student became a more perceptive observer of behaviour in an educational setting. This means the student must see what is happening. A secondary goal was for the student to begin to make some sense out of what is observed. Why did one student behave in the way he did--what was the meaning of this behaviour to him? What did the student gain from it? How could an observer explain the behaviour in terms of knowledge gained from readings associated with the course? The project was based on the working premise that all behaviour serves a purpose for the behaver himself, and the hardest job for a teacher is to make sense out of behaviour which seems to be merely nonsense. The student was requested to observe on-going relationships over an extended period of time, handing in brief reports after each period of three observations. A longer summary report was requested at the end of the course.

VI. Examinations. Examinations are required by the university and serve a useful function both in terms of evaluation and as a aid to integration of course content. In most social interaction situations, both in life and in school, there is no single right answer or solution to a problem. Teachers need to be aware, for example, that there is no best way of handling a given discipline situation. Witness of this is found in the variety of opinion on solutions to Critical Incidents in Teaching reported by Corsini and Howard (1964). It also follows that there is little point in memorizing most of the material present in textbooks today. In real life, most of this material would be readily

available on the teacher's shelf or library in the event he had need of it. It was deemed more realistic, then, to utilize open-book or take-home type examinations. This has also alleviated much of the anxiety associated with any type of testing situation, particularly for highly anxious students.

VII. Weighting of Final Grade. The freedom to chose percentage weights for the final grade in the course presented a welcome but difficult situation for students. For many, anticipation of a grade serves both as a threat and a motivator. Every class member has liked the option of deciding how much weight is to be placed on each portion of their contribution of the course. This includes the option of doing or not doing certain things, such as writing a term paper or taking an optional exam for credit in the course. However, the mere realization that one must make a decision confronted many a student with his own uncertainty as to how he wanted to be graded. Only time seemed to reduce this anxiety for some.

VIII. Textbooks and Readings. Textbooks for the course changed from term to term as students evaluated and suggested new and relevant books. The three major texts currently being used are all paperback editions by authors who write in a readable manner, and talk about very practically-oriented issues. Undergraduate students tent to react somewhat negatively to books which are purely academic or research oriented, yet such books do have a very useful function as information sources and collatoral reading in the course. Although the course had a strong academic element, with a lengthy bibliography and reading list, students tended to comment that the readings assigned were interesting and worthwhile. Indeed, many students indicated that they wanted to read more for this course than for most other courses. Some of the major references found useful are listed at the end of this article.

Conclusion

Although a few students who were unable to handle the freedom involved in the course dropped out, the vast majority stayed and welcomed the experiences presented. Changes in both attitudes towards teaching and attitudes towards fellow students have been manifested by individual members of the course during the term. After one week, students tended to know more members of

the class than they did after a full year of work in other classes; many have commented on the relaxed nature of the class and the fellowship enjoyed with other students.

Following are two typical comments from students at the end of the course:

> The course has met my expectations in giving me some guidelines in dealing with the behaviour of students. I am quite sure that now, I will stop and think about a situation and consider it more closely before I deal with it. I may not handle all situations properly or any differently than what I have done in the past, but I am sure I will look at them with a different point of view. Getting a good mark is not important anymore because it is what I have gained from the course that is important.

> Not only was I able to get factual information from the course, I have made lasting friendships that I have felt have been more important than the course itself. I am surprised to see the extent to which groups have been used and can see where I can use them more effectively. I was pleased to see the amount of interaction and was able to get ideas from the discussions that I wouldn't have been able to get by myself.

Not every professor will be able to utilize some of the ideas presented in this paper. There was a lot of bookkeeping chores, critiques, marking and time spent with students outside of class. Also involved is the idiosyncratic nature of the instructor as well as his conceptions about education and the nature of man. It is hoped that more instructors will learn to trust students sufficiently to give them a voice in their own learning experiences.

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U N I V E R S I T Y O F A L B E R T A

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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Personal and Social Dynamics in Education

COURSE OUTLINE

TEXTS AND READINGS:

Bany, M.A. and Johnson, L.U., Classroom Group Behavior. New York: Macmillan, 1964.

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White, W.F. Psychosocial principles applied to classroom teaching. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.

** Highly recommended for purchase.
* Recommended for purchase.
(Most of the other books are available for purchase or on reserve in the library.)
A more detailed reference and reading list will be available later.

FORMAT and GROUP INVOLVEMENT

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (Teaching as a Subversive Activity) have wondered what would happen if all syllabi, textbooks, and standardized tests disappeared. They claim this material impedes innovation in schools. The question they pose is how to turn such a "catastrophe" into an opportunity to increase relevance in education.

What Ed. Psych. 421 (04) proposes to do is give you a chance to make the course just as relevant as you desire as long as a few basic ground rules are followed. Therefore, no syllabus is presented, no textbook required and no test mandatory. Learning can be "fun" or "work" but does take time. We hope that the time you spend on this course will be worthwhile and relevant for you. We will try to individualize instruction as much as possible in a class of 100 students, but the initiative and motivation must come from you. A series of questions is presented on the last page of this "Course Outline". Think through these questions and within the next three weeks decide "What's worth Knowing" for you as a prospective teacher on the general topic of "Personal-social dynamics in education."

Any useful course involves a balancing of (1) individual needs of students with those of (2) the instructor and (3) the group as a whole. For this reason we begin the course with some statement about the instructor's needs and request students to feed back information about their own needs for learning.

One need of the instructor is to provide a relevant course with valid, student oriented goals. The major goal of the instructor is to enable students to become involved in and learn both cognitively and experientially about human interaction in a school setting together with ways in which behavior is and can be changed. With this kind of goal in mind it is important to the instructor that students begin to see (that is, perceive accurately) what is happening in interpersonal relationships. A secondary goal is for the student to begin to make sense out of what is being observed so he can become more skilled in handling interpersonal problems. One of the best ways to learn how to perceive and understand behavior is to become an observer in an actual classroom setting. Opportunity will be afforded in this course for students to do this very thing.

Another need is to be able to evaluate the student in a meaningful way, providing him feedback information about his:

(1) ongoing performance;
(2) overall performance in the form of a final mark acceptable to the university; and
(3) attitudes, values, conceptualization and insights.

Student needs vary according to the individual. One general student need is successful completion of the course with as much return for time invested as possible. It is anticipated that all students will successfully complete the course.

Further individual student course oriented learning needs can only be discovered by requesting students to indicate their individual goals and preferences during the coming 13 week course. To this end we cannot assume that a single text, assigned readings, term assignments, etc. will make sense for all students during the course. The planned procedure is for students, instructor and the class as a whole to make decisions with respect to the course.

SPECIAL NOTE:

Each student is therefore requested to prepare for the second day of class a brief resume of his goals and expectations in taking the course. These will be analyzed by the instructor for discussion the third and fourth day of class by various class groupings.

The class will be divided into 10 groups and each group will be asked to elect a steering committee representative who will meet with the instructor twice a week for the first three weeks of the course.

The Steering Committee will meet with the instructor each Tuesday and Thursday from January 13 through January 29 at 12:30 p.m. in room 401 of the Education Building.

Monday and Wednesday, January 12 and 14, one of five general areas of concern will be provided each pair of groups. These groups will work as teams with each group observing the other group at work for some 10-12 minute segments of time. The goal for these two days is:

1. To experience the beginning of one's own group
2. To observe another group and its members interacting while discussing the same material about which one's own group is concerned
3. To develop a group feeling for the course as a whole and the involvement and participation of both the members individually and as a total group in the structure of the course.

The specific task of the 10 groups during the third and fourth class days will be to develop specific questions about areas to be covered and suggestions as to what can be done to answer these questions. For example:

1) What can a lecture do?
2) What can an individual working on his own achieve?
3) What resources are needed?
4) How can this topic be integrated with the work of other groups?
5) How can student learning in a particular area be appropriately evaluated?

The specific job of the steering committee will be to integrate all areas discussed by individual groups into one complete course. How much of some thirty odd class periods should be devoted to each of the areas discussed? How much work will be able to be done by students on their own? Who will need help with what? How can a final evaluation be made?

It is anticipated that the only set agenda for the term will be for the instructor to meet the class of a whole on some six Mondays during the remainder of the course. He will assume responsibility for these days. The rest of the time will be allocated through the steering committee.

Class will meet as scheduled during the month of January. Class will also meet February 9 and 23; March 9, 23 and 30; and April 6. Other dates will be decided prior to February 1.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

By January 30 each student will be required to: (1) file a detailed program of how he plans to merge his individual goals with those of the instructor.
(2) meet individually with one of the instructors between January 26 and February 6 for 10 minutes to discuss his planned program. A time sign-up sheet will be available by January 21st.

Generally a "contract" will be agreed upon between the instructor and the student at this time including how the student wants to be evaluated by himself, his peers and the instructor. Although it is the student's responsibility to complete the program planned, if his program does not fully meet his ongoing needs or he senses a change in attitude during the term, it is subject to revision at any time after consulting the instructor.

The instructors are aware that this procedure is different from that usually adopted in other courses. Students may become frustrated because the exact material to be covered or "learned" is not outlined. Students will protest that the "instructor knows what is essential to be learned and it is his responsibility to teach us." It is the instructor'scontention that students will learn only what they want to learn and can never be taught anything. If the student knows nothing of the field he must first inquireabout the field and then decide (existentially) where he wants to spend his time. Personal and social dynamics is a broad area. You are encouraged to sample and taste widely before committing yourself. We will help you with your sampling, but the final decision for learning is up to you (as it always has been in all other courses.)

Postman and Weingartner (1969, p.62 suggest:

Reflect on these questions--and others that these can generate. Please do not merely react to them.

What do you worry about most?
What are the causes of your worries?
Can any of your worries be eliminated? How?
Which of them might you deal with first? How do you decide?
Are there other people with the same problems? How do you know? How can you find out?
What bothers you most about children? Why?
What, if anything, seems to you to be worth dying for?
How did you come to believe this?
What seems worth living for?
How did you come to believe this?
What kind of person would you most like to be? How might you get to be this kind of person?
At the present moment, what would you most like to be doing? Five years from now? Ten years from now? Why? What might you have to do to realize these hopes? What might you have to give up in order to do some or all of these things?
When you hear or read or observe something, how do you know what it means?
Where does meaning "come from"?
What does "meaning" mean?
Where does knowledge come from?
What do you think are some of man's most important ideas? Where did they come from? Why? How? Now what?
What's a "good idea"?
What is "progress"?
What is "change"?
What kinds of changes are going on right now? Which are important? How are they similar to or different from other changes that have occurred?
Of the important changes going on in our society, which should be encouraged and which resisted? Why? How?
What are the most important changes that have occurred in the past ten years? twenty years? fifty years? In the last year? In the last six months? Last month? What will be the most important changes next month? Next year? Next decade? How can you tell? So what?
What would you change if you could? How might you go about it? Of those changes which are going to occur, which would you stop if you could? Why? How? So what?
Who do you think has the most important things to say today? To whom? How? Why?
What are the dumbest and most dangerous ideas that are "popular" today? Why do you think so? Where did these ideas come from?
What's worth knowing? How do you decide? What are some ways to go about getting to know what's worth knowing?

Ed. Psych. 421 (04) Dr. L. Eberlein

Student Proposal for Individual Program of Study and Efforts

Each student to do one or more "Efforts" totalling 100%. Name_____

Possible Areas of Effort	Details of Each Student Undertaking (concrete & specific)	% of Final Mark	Method of Evaluation
A. What individual efforts do you intend to make (list; e.g., action research, library research, other experiences) and how do you expect to accomplish them?	(1)		
B. Do you plan to take individual exams? Indicate yes or no. [Note: you may choose one individual exam and one group exam]	Midterm_____ Final_____		

Effort	Details	%	Evaluation
C. What group efforts do you intend to participate in (presentations, studies, projects, etc.) with your present group and with any newly formed groups?	(1)		
D. Do you plan to take group exams? Indicate yes or no.	Midterm_____ Final _____		
E. Other effort.			
F. What final grade are you working for?	_____	100%	

Notes: (1) Please bring goals of course prepared second day of class.
(2) Please attach a list of books or available journals which you
(a) have already read
(b) intend to read, and
indicate relevance to individual or group projects.
(3) In case some "effort" is not evaluated as acceptable toward the grade desired in (F.), how will you want the situation resolved?